

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2002

S E C R E T BANGKOK 20535

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, TH

SUBJ: WHAT'S A NICE ADMIRAL LIKE HIM DOING IN A PLACE LIKE THAT?

REF: STATE 226642

1. ACCORDING TO INFORMATION AVAILABLE FROM VARIOUS SOURCES HERE, INCLUDING NEWSPAPER STORIES, ROYAL THAI ARMED FORCES SUPREME COMMAND IS TO BE REVAMPED. IN THE NEW CONFIGURATION, ADMIRAL SA-NGAT CHALOYU WILL BE SUPREME COMMANDER, AIR CHIEF MARSHAL KAMON DECHATUNGKHA WILL BE DEPUTY SUPREME COMMANDER AND GENERAL KRIANGSAK CHAMANAN WILL BE ASSISTANT SUPREME COMMANDER. KRIANGSAK'S CURRENT DEPUTY, GENERAL CHAROEN PHONGPHANIT, WILL REPLACE HIM AS CHIEF OF STAFF SUPREME COMMAND. IN MOST VERSIONS OF THE STORY, ADMIRAL SA-NGAT RETAINS COMMAND OF THE NAVY AND ACM KAMON COMMAND OF THE AIR FORCE,

2. THE NEW STRUCTURE IS REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN DESIGNED BY GENERAL KRIT SIWARA, OUTGOING ACTING SUPREME COMMANDER AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, ROYAL THAI ARMY. SA-NGAT IS FIRMLY IN KRIT'S CAMP. HE WOULD BE THE FIRST NAVAL OFFICER TO FILL THE JOB OF SUPREME COMMANDER.

3. A RESTRUCTURING OF SUPREME COMMAND HAS BEEN PLANNED FOR SOME TIME. EARLIER, IT HAD BEEN THOUGHT THAT SUPREME COMMAND WOULD BE EXTINGUISHED IN FAVOR OF A MORE JCS-LIKE ENTITY, WHICH THE RUMORED NEW ORGANIZATION DOES NOT RESEMBLE EXCEPT TO THE EXTENT

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THAT IT FILLS THE TOP THREE JOBS IN SUPREME COMMAND WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE SERVICES. ADMIRAL

SA-NGAT RECENTLY TOLD AN EMBASSY OFFICER THAT IN THE NEW CONCEPT, THE SERVICES WOULD ALTERNATE AT THE TOP, WITH ACM KAMON REPLACING HIM AS SUPREME COMMANDER UPON HIS RETIREMENT IN OCTOBER 1976 AND KRIANGSAK NEXT IN LINE BEHIND KAMON.

4. IT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR WHAT KRIT HAD IN MIND WHEN HE DESIGNED THIS EXOTIC NEW STRUCTURE. PERHAPS KRIT, IN ANTICIPATION OF BECOMING MINISTER OF DEFENSE, WISHED TO SEPARATE THE SUPREME COMMAND FROM THE COMMAND OF RTA, BOTH OF WHICH HE NOW HOLDS, THE BETTER TO CONTROL BOTH. IN ANY CASE, SUPREME COMMAND HAS BEEN AND WOULD REMAIN RELATIVELY POWERLESS, THIS IS EMPHASIZED BY THE ABSENCE OF THE INCOMING COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY, GENERAL BUNCHAI BAMRUNGPHONE, FROM THE TRIUMVIRATE AT THE TOP. THE ARMY WILL CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE MILITARY POWER STRUCTURE EVEN THOUGH SA-NGAT AND KAMON RETAIN THEIR ROLES OF COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF OF THE NAVY AND AIR FORCE. KRIANGSAK IS NOT A POWER IN THE RTA.

5. REFTTEL RESTS ON WHAT APPEARS TO US THE FALSE PREMISE THAT SUPREME COMMAND, AND THE NEW SUPREME COMMANDER, WILL CUT A MORE IMPORTANT FIGURE THAN BEFORE IN THE INTERPLAY OF FORCES HERE. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT THIS IS LIKELY TO BE THE CASE, BUT EXPECT SUPREME COMMAND IN PRACTICE TO REMAIN, IN A MILITARY SENSE AND IN POLITICAL POWER TERMS, THE IMPOTENT THING IT HAS BEEN IN THE PAST, WITH KRIANGSAK CONTINUING TO RUN IT AS PRETTY MUCH A ONE-MAN SHOW.

6. SEPTTEL ADDRESSES THREE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN REFTTEL.
MASTERS

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